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TAGGING STUDY OF WINTER FLOUNDER
TAKEN IN BARNEGAT BAY

Progress Report for the Period August 1979 through June 1980

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for

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Tagging Study of Winter Flounder Taken in Barnegat Bay

Donald J. Danila

INTRODUCTION

Winter flounder consist of geographically localized stocks associated with individual estuaries or specific coastal areas (Lobell 1939, Perlmutter 1947, Saila 1961, McCracken 1963, Poole 1966, Howe and Coates 1975). Adults are found in the ocean from late spring through early fall, but return to their natal estuary for spawning during winter.

A tagging study was initiated at the Oyster Creek Generating Station (OCGS) in December 1978 (Danila and Byrne 1979) to determine the spatial distribution and movements of the Barnegat Bay winter flounder stock. The location of recaptured winter flounder in late 1979 and early 1980 should indicate the extent of the stock's range. This information will be vital in assessment of OCGS impacts upon Barnegat Bay winter flounder.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

All procedures concerning the tagging of winter flounder and handling of returns were detailed by Danila and Byrne (1979).

RESULTS

A total of 971 winter flounder (776 females, 193 males, 2 unknown) were tagged and released from 12 December 1978 through 2 February 1979 and Danila and Byrne (1979) reported that 76 were recaptured from late December 1978 through 10 July 1979 (Table 1, Fig. 1). Most of these were

taken by Barnegat Bay fishermen (n=42) during the spring emigration of winter flounder from the Bay. Other returns were from a Barnegat Bay fyke net fisherman (22), 8 were reimpinged on the OCGS screens, and 4 were taken during spring and summer by commercial trawl fishermen off Manasquan and Asbury Park, New Jersey.

A total of 32 tags (3.3% of all winter flounder tagged) were returned from August 1979 through June 1980 (Table 2, Fig. 2). Sixteen were received from sport fishermen (including one from a fish caught in March 1979), 12 from a Barnegat Bay fyke net fisherman, and 4 from commercial trawl fishermen or fish markets.

The earliest two returns in fall 1979 were from commercial trawl fishermen during October in the same area off central New Jersey as commercial returns earlier in 1979. Two returns were from fish markets during November (Point Pleasant, New Jersey and New York City); the actual location of capture is unknown but the fish were probably also caught off central New Jersey.

The earliest sport fishing return was from the Manasquam River on 27 October. Two fish were taken in Barnegat Inlet in late November. Three fish were caught in Oyster Creek from the Route 9 bridge and one in Double Creek during December and early January. As expected, no fish were caught by sport fishermen during the winter flounder spawning season from mid-January through early March as winter flounder cease feeding during this time. Four of the eight returns from mid-March through early April were from the approaches to Barnegat Inlet; one was from Double Creek, two from the Intracoastal Waterway adjacent to Long Beach Island, and the last tag return was from Barnegat Bay off the mouth of Oyster Creek.

Twelve winter flounder were taken by a commercial fyke net fisherman from 1 December 1979 through 15 January 1980; the date of each capture was not recorded. All fish were caught just south of Oyster Creek near the Holiday Harbor Marina entrance.

Some 27 of the winter flounder tag returns in late 1979-early 1980 were females (87%) and 4 were males (13%). The mean length at time of tagging of winter flounder was 289 mm for females and 251 mm for males. Females taken by commercial trawl fishermen averaged 320 mm, 279 mm for those by the fyke net fisherman, and 286 mm for those by sport fishermen. The mean length of three males taken by fyke net was 251 mm and the only male taken by sport fishing was 250 mm at time of tagging. The length information which should have been received with tag returns and would have indicated rate of growth was generally missing or considered unreliable.

DISCUSSION

To date, 11% of the winter flounder tagged at OCGS were returned. This is far less than the 32.5% and 36.5% returns in tagging studies reported by Saila (1961) and Howe and Coates (1975), respectively. The latter, however, noted that returns from various tagging areas ranged from 5 to 67% and both studies reported on tag returns received over several years. Also, most of the returns reported by Saila (1961) and Howe and Coates (1975) were from commercial fishermen, whereas most of the Barnegat Bay returns were from sport fishermen. Sport fishing effort can be highly variable and the total effort much less than that for commercial fishing. Most winter flounder fishing is done over a relatively short period in winter and early spring and inclement weather, common at

this time of year, can greatly reduce fishing effort. The relatively low percentage of returns was probably also due to the lack of cooperation by some fishermen despite poster advertising, newspaper publicity, and the reward offered for the return of tags. At least two instances are known when tags were discarded, several at a fish market and one by a sport fisherman.

Natural mortality, differential mortality due to tagging, and loss of tags reduce the number of returns received each year. One-third as many sport fishing returns were received—in 1980 as in 1979. The 1979-80 fyke net catch of tagged winter flounder was about one-half that in 1978-79, but partly because of reduced fishing effort. Because of large amounts of macroalgae in the Bay, only one net was fished in 1979-80 from December to mid-January. In 1978-79 several nets were fished from December through February (N. Dupont, personal communication). In addition, OCGS was not in operation from January through May and no adult winter flounder were impinged in 1980. The lack of a heated discharge in Oyster Creek after OCGS shutdown also eliminated a popular winter sport fishery for winter flounder at the Route 9 bridge.

In general, winter flounder movements in and out of Barnegat Bay are similar to those reported for other northeastern estuaries. Movements of adult winter flounder are temperature-related and relatively short in distance. Adults leave the estuary when the water temperature is about 15 C. They are most abundant in the ocean at a water temperature of 12 to 15 C and this is probably their preferred temperature (McCracken 1963). Adult winter flounder left Barnegat Bay in spring and based on tag returns

from commercial vessels spent the summer in the ocean northeast of
Barnegat Inlet in an offshore area from Point Pleasant to Asbury Park.
This apparent northeastern movement may be biased because of the believed greater commercial fishing effort in that region.

In response to decreasing fall water temperature adult winter flounder move inshore to spawn in natal estuaries. The recapture location of fish in late 1979 and early 1980 indicated that most adults return annually to Barnegat Bay, with some probably entering other New Jersey estuaries. Barnegat Inlet is the major migratory pathway and this is noteworthy because the summer grounds are apparently off Shark River and Manasquan inlets.

The distribution and concentration of winter flounder within
Barnegat Bay cannot be ascertained from the tag returns because most
fishing effort was concentrated in and near Oyster Creek and in Oyster Creek
and Double Creek channels, the two Intracoastal Waterway approaches to
Barnegat Inlet. Although Danila (1978b) reported some of the largest
densities of winter flounder in the Bay from Forked River mouth to
Goodluck Point, only one return was received from that area (Danila and
Byrne 1979). In a study of the recreational use of Upper Barnegat Bay
(defined as from Barnegat Inlet to Bayhead), Halgren (1973) reported
that most (65%) boat fishing activity occurred from Barnegat Inlet to
Goodluck Point but remarked that within this area most fishermen utilized
Oyster Creek and Double Creek channels.

The northern limit of the Barnegat Bay stock of adult winter flounder is at least Toms River and probably Bayhead. Danila (1978b) did not sample north of Goodluck Point in a population survey for winter flounder but

McClain (1973) took winter flounder at all of a continuous series of trawl stations throughout the Upper Bay. The relative numbers of adults and juveniles taken in his study are not known, however. At times salinity in the Upper Bay in the Lavellette-Silver Bay area may be a barrier to adult winter flounder movements in the uppermost portion of the Bay. When most winter flounder disperse from estuaries during March and April salinity there is about 12 to 13 ppt (Makai 1973). In surveys made in Great Bay and other estuarine waters near Little Egg Inlet from 1972 through 1975 adults were not taken at a salinity below 17 ppt, although young were taken at a salinity near 0 in tidal fresh water (Danila 1978a). The lethal salinity for winter flounder (presumably adults) was reported as about 8 ppt by McCracken (1963).

The only outlet to the ocean from northern Barnegat Bay besides

Barnegat Inlet is via the Point Pleasant Canal to the Manasquan River and

Manasquan Inlet. The collection of two individuals from the Manasquan River

and Inlet indicated that a few winter flounder used this passage during

migration or that a mixing occurred with the Manasquan estuary stock. The

uppermost Bay may contain fish from both stocks. Howe and Coates (1975)

reported that numerous winter flounder were taken in or moved through the

Cape Cod Canal which connects Buzzards Bay and Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts.

The southern limit of the Barnegat Bay stock of winter flounder is also unclear but may be Manahawkin Bay. A few winter flounder were taken south of Manahawkin Bay in Little Egg Harbor but these may have been outmigrants that would have used Beach Haven-Little Egg Inlet. No winter flounder were recaptured south of Beach Haven in 1979 or 1980. Himchak (1976) reported considerably more man-days of fishing effort in

the Manahawkin Bay-Little Egg Harbor system (defined as from Harvey Cedars to Little Egg Inlet) than Halgren (1973) did for Upper Barnegat Bay. If a continuous population of winter flounder existed from Barnegat Bay through Little Egg Harbor more returns would have been expected from the latter area. Manahawkin Bay may be an area where mixing occurs between the Barnegat Bay and Little Egg Harbor populations. Poole (1966) described the winter flounder of several adjacent, interconnected bays in Long Island as separate populations with different growth characteristics.

Additional returns in 1981, although expected to be sparse, should provide additional information as to the movements and range of Barnegat Bay winter flounder.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Roberta E. Fish typed the manuscript.

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Rate of Travel (km/day) 0.53 - 2.00 Movement
Circular
Circular Distance Traveled from OCGS (km)
10.0
10.0
10.0
10.0
10.0
10.0
10.0 Barnegat Light

BB - off Barnegat

LT - Basch Haven

Barnegat Light

DC Ch

OC Ch

DC Ch

Barnegat Light

CC Ch

LEH - Westecurk Creek

BB - off Re mouth

CC Ch

LEH

CC Ch

LEH

CC Ch

BB - off Re mouth

CC Ch

BB - off Re mouth

CC Ch

BB - Harvey Codars

Manaquan biles

CC Ch

BB - Harvey Codars

Manaquan biles

CC Ch

BB - Harvey Codars

Manaquan biles

CC Ch

CC Ch

BB - Harvey Codars

Manaquan biles

CC Ch

CC Ch Banegat Light LEH - Peabala Park LEH - Beach Haven 88 - Harvey Cedars Shark River Inlet OC Ch OC - Rt 9 bridge OC - Rt 9 bridge B8 - off OC mouth B8 - Mud Channel OC Ch Summary of all winter flounder tag returns from lane December 1978 through 10 july 1979 by method of recapture. Date Recaptured
3 January
19 January
25 January
26 January
1 February
1 February
27 February
27 February
2 February
2 February
2 February Implugement Sampling^a

,	
•	

							•		Major Company	
						Days at		Distance Traveled	Direction of	Rate of
	E S	Length	Y	Date Released	Date Recaptured	Large	Place Recaptured	from OCCS (km)	Movement	Travel (km/dav)
P .				15 December	December - February	2	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	٠.
ryko net	: 5	, E	. 4	15 December	December - February	••	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	~
	;	176	. ≥	20 December	December - February	۴.	FR dwough WT	< 2° 6	NE - SW	•
	21	563		20 December	December - February	٠.	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	۴-
		200	. ш	22 December		~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	-
			. 4	28 December		~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	~
	5 5	2		4 fanuary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< s. s	NE - SW	~
		5 5	. u	4 lamen		~	FR through WT	< s. s	NE - SW	~
	8 8	200	, u	24 January	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - 3N	~
	9 6	} ;	. u	24 lanuary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	
	· ·	1 :	. u	29 fanuary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	~
	2 5	500	. u	29 fannary	December + February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	
	1 7	886	. >	29 Ianuary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	~
		Ş	: u	29 fantary	December - February	•-	FR through WT	< s.s	NE - SW	~
	372	8 8	. u	29 January	December - February	۴.	FR through WT	< 5.8	NE - SW	~
	2 2	257	. <u>i</u>	29 January	December - February		FR through WT	< 5.8	NE - SM	
		9	. u	29 Tamary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	AS - 3K	-
		818		29 January	December - February	٠.	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	,
			. u.	30 January	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - SW	~
		310	. 14.	30 farmary	December - February	٠.	FR through WT	< 5.5	NE - 3N	•-
	8	Ę,	. 11.	30 Landary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 5,5	NE - SW	•-
	98	267	. ≆	30 Ismary	December - February	~	FR through WT	< 8.8	NE - SW	۴-
the state of the s	910	Ş	u	30 fantary	2 May	8	Ocean off Managuan	59.2	a N	2.0
Commercial interest	2.5	287	. 7	30 January	31 May	122	Ocean off Manasquan	11.1	NE	0.58
•	. 53	290	· u.	24 January	21 June	149	Ocean off Asbury Park	67.3	N.	0.48
	ă	3.5	· tt	30 Jaquary	10 July	162	Ocean off Managuan	65.7	NE	0.41

Number of first impinged specimen not successined. All fish except No. 191 released again in good condition. No. 637 originally accidentally released or excepted from sagging mortally study. Actual date of first release unknown,

OC - Oyter Creek
OC Ch - Oyter Creek Channel
OCGS - Impingement Sampling Staton
WT - Waterown Prace name abbreviations:

88 - Barnegat Bay

DC Ch - Double Ocek Channel

RR - Forked River

LEN - Little Egg Harbor

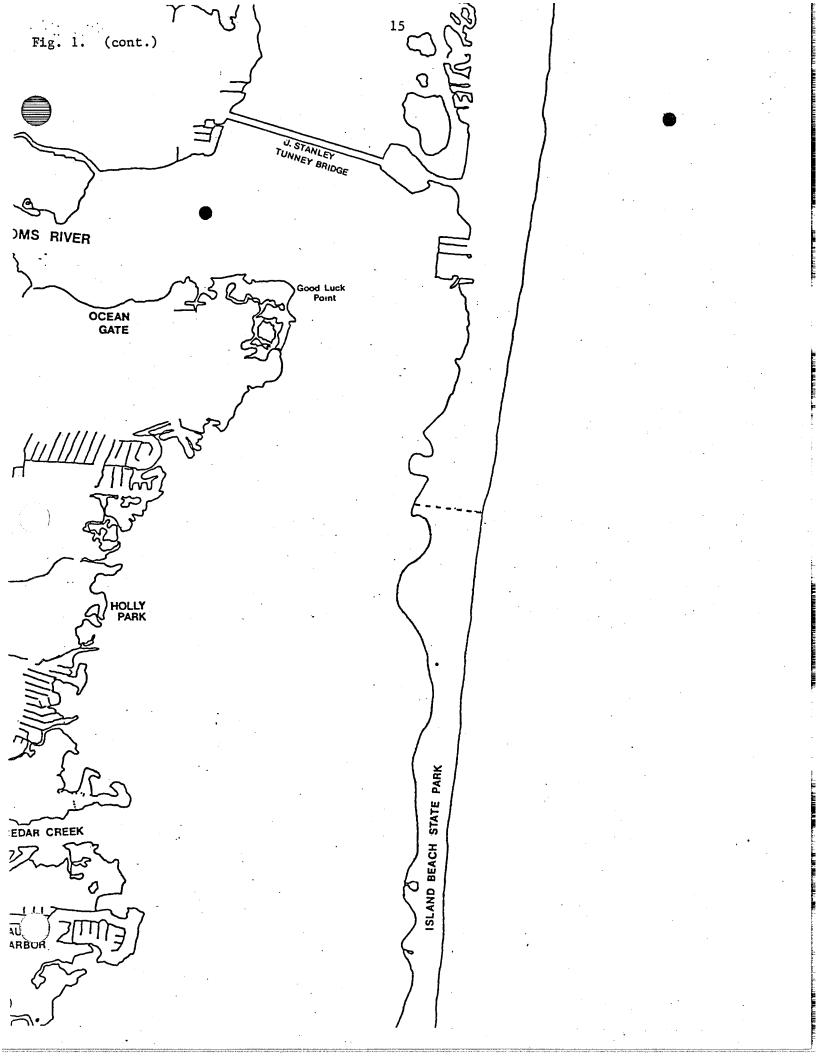
dexact dates and locations of tyke net return are not known. Various nen were set along store from Forked River to Waretown from December through February.

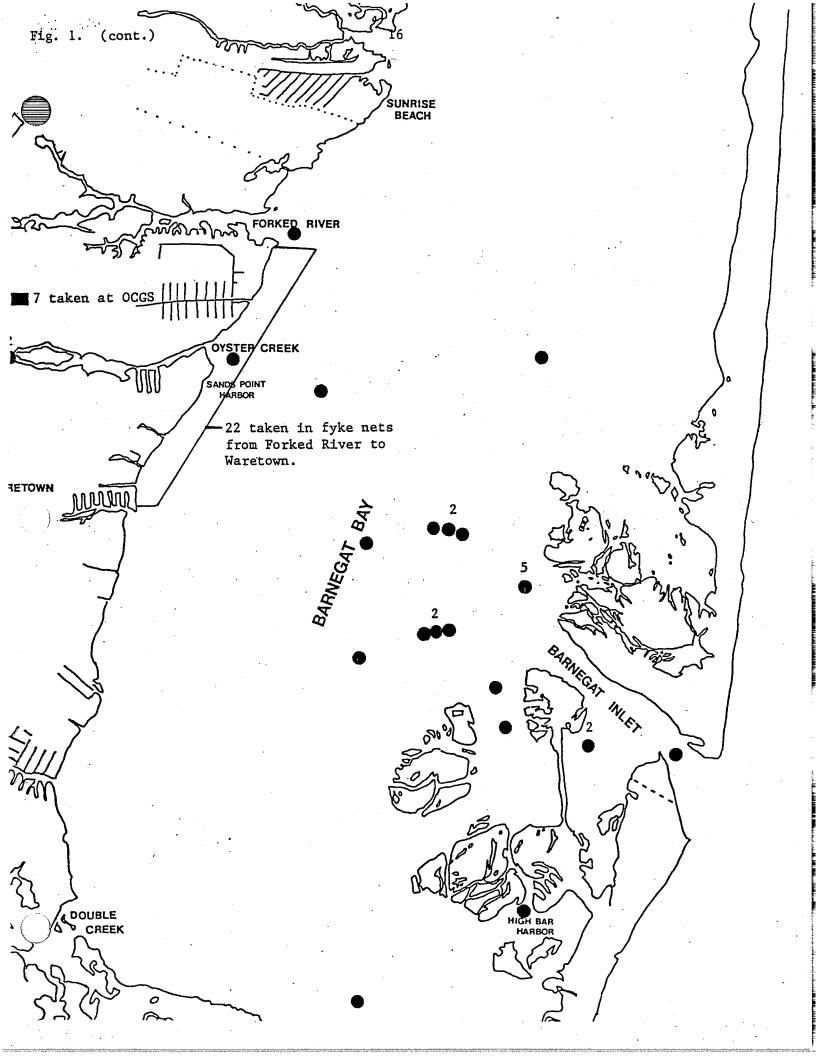
Summary of all winter flounder tag returns from August 1979 through June 1980 by method of recapture. Table 2.

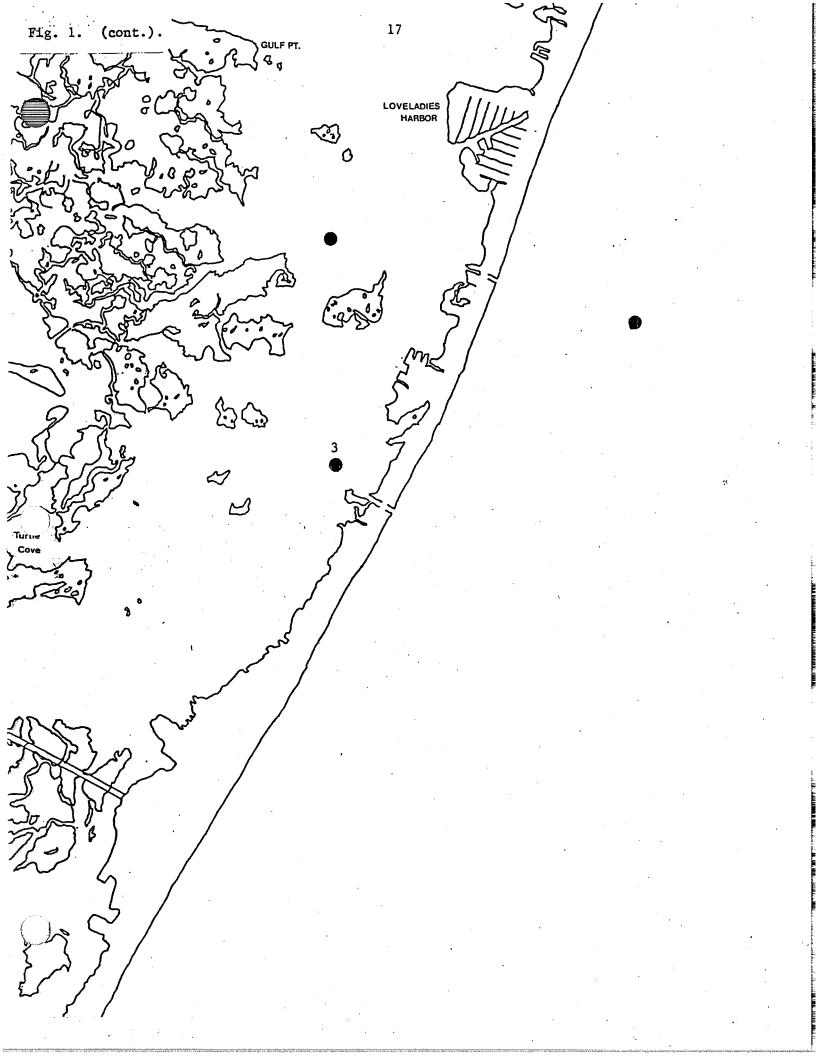
						Days at	
	Tag No.	Length	Sex	Date Released	Date Recaptured		Place Recaptured
Sport fishing	508.	318	E4	4 Jan 79	Mar	80	Double Creek Channel
	180	279	፲	20 Dec 78	27 Oct 79	311	Manasquan River-near Rt 70
							bridge
	404	305	ÍΞι	4 Jan 79	20 Nov 79	320	Barnegat Light
	143	300	딾	19 Dec 78	25 Nov 79	341	Barnegat Inlet
	96	309	딾	24 Jan 79	8 Dec 79	318	
	806	260	뇬	29 Jan 79	10 Dec 79	315	Oyster Creek-Rt 9 bridge
	855	242	ᄄ	29 Jan 79	3 Jan 80	339	6
	610	308	딾	24 Jan 79	Jan	344	Oyster Creek-Rt 9 bridge
	244	296	ഥ	28 Dec 78	Mar	444	Oyster Creek Channel-Buoy 37
	922	286	뇬	Jan	Mar	410	ò
	38	250	×	15 Dec 78	25 Mar 80	994	Beach Haven Crest-Light 43
	194	290	딸	19 Dec 78	7 Apr 80	475	Double Creek Channel
	434	274	뇬	4 Jan 79	8 Apr 80	760	Ship Bottom-19th St
•	189	253	Ή	19 Dec 78	12 Apr 80	480	Double Creek Channel?
,	293	297	[드	22 Dec 78	12 Apr 80	477	Double Creek
	504	309	Œ	4 Jan 79	13 Apr 80	465	Barnegat Bay-Buoy 66
Rube het	~	300	<u>[+</u>	19 Dec 78	1 Dec 79-15 Jan 80	348-395	Barnegat Bay-Off Holiday Harbor
2011	~	272	[iz.	15 Dec 78	79-15	352-400	Bay-Off
	81	275	Lz.		79-15	352-400	Bay-Off Holiday
	220	279	ſΞ.	22 Dec 78	79-15	345-393	Barnegat Bay-Off Holiday Harbor
	226	265	[79-15 Jan	345-393	
	411	231	Ħ	4 Jan 79	1 Dec 79-15 Jan 80	332-375	
	517	259	×	Jan	Jan	327-370	
•	743	263	Ħ	•	Jan	307-350	
	749	268	ᄄ	Jan	Jan	307-350	
	929	302	[24	30 Jan 79	Jan	306-349	Bay-Off Holiday
	.026	269	ഥ	30 Jan 79	1 Dec 79-15 Jan 80	306-349	
 -,	978	280	ĬΨ	30 Jan 79	1 Dec 79-15 Jan 80	306-349	Barnegat Bay-Off Holiday Harbor
Commercial	61	290	또	19 Dec 78	5 Oct 79	290	Ocean-Off Pt. Pleasant
trawler	887	334	Ţ	Jan	15 Oct 79	258	Ocean-Off Manasquan
	59	313	ᄕᅫ	19 Dec 78	Nov	322	Ocean-?-Pt. Pleasant Seafood Market
	195	344	ഥ	19 Dec 78	14 Nov 79	330	Ocean-?-New York City Seafood
							Marker

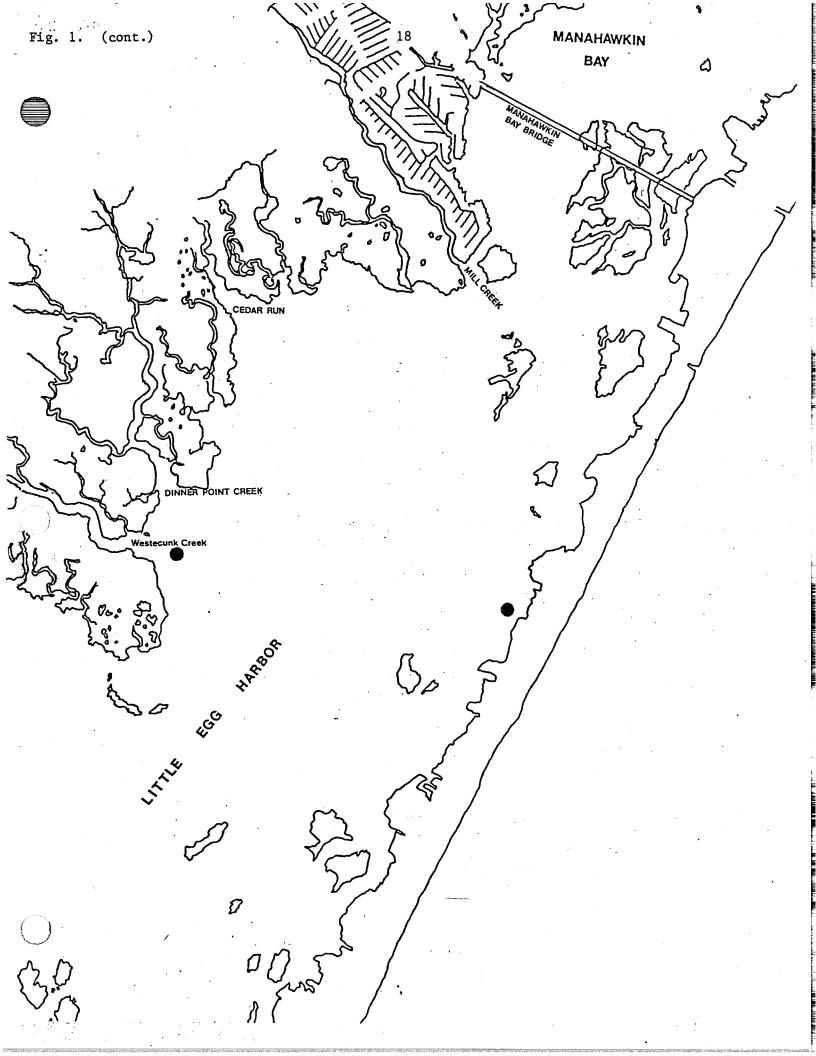
adelinquent return-not reported in Danila and Byrne (1979).

Fig. 1. Location of recaptures () of winter flounder based on tag returns from late December 1978 through 10 July 1979. Digits indicate multiple returns from one location.









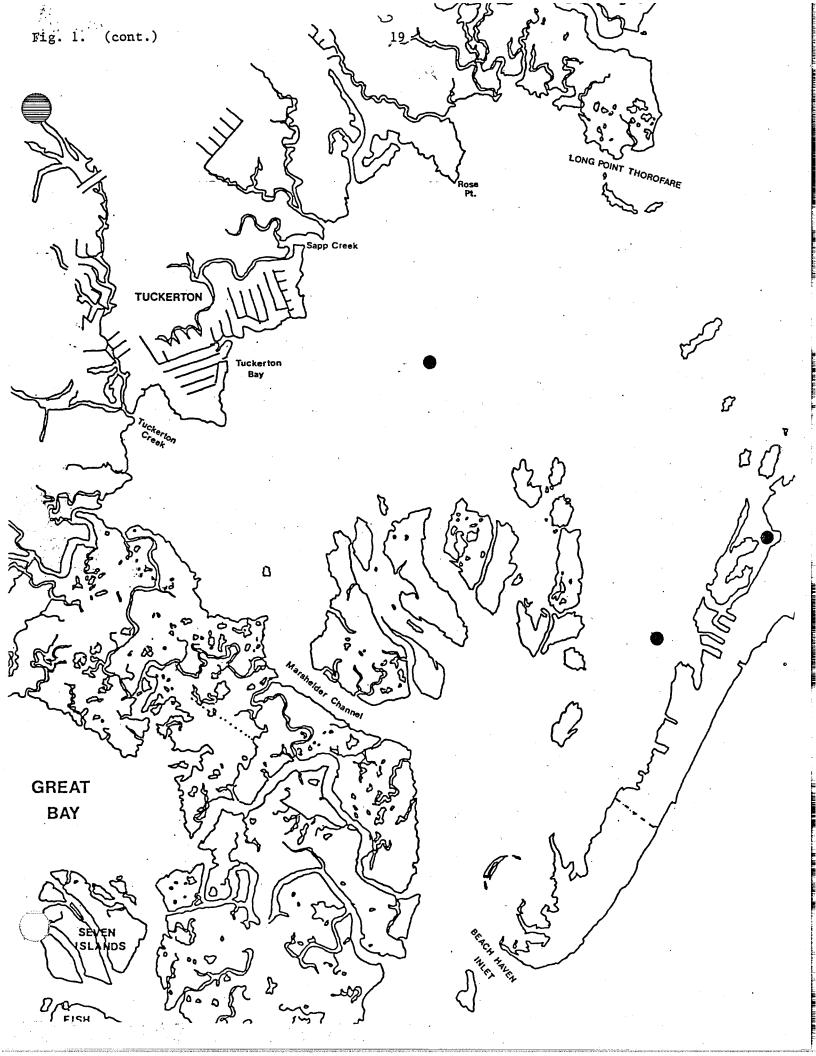


Fig. 2. Locations of recaptures () of winter flounder based on tag returns from August 1979 through June 1980. Digits indicate multiple returns from one location.

